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RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 1350  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GB](#)  
SUBJECT: BONGO AND FREEMASONRY IN GABON

REF: LIBREVILLE 00035

Classified By: Ambassador Barrie Walkley for reasons 1.4 b and d

1.(U) As Gabon awaits the announcement of a new government (expected later this week), there is speculation regarding the number of Freemasons that will be included in the cabinet. Although hard figures are difficult to obtain, it is estimated that there about 800 Masons in Gabon (from a population of 1.4 million) and it is widely believed in Libreville that over 80 per cent of the current cabinet and members of parliament are Masons (and that the majority of influential businessmen, both Gabonese and French, are also Masons).

2.(U) Freemasonry in Gabon dates to the founding of the first lodge in 1902 and the influence established in business and government realms by Freemasons during the colonial period continued after independence (Gabon's first president -- Leon Mba -- was, for example, a Mason). There are currently three Masonic lodges in Gabon: one associated with the Grande Loge Nationale Francaise (GLNF), one associated with the Grand Orient de France (GOF), and one -- the Grande Rite Symbolique du Gabon (GRSG) -- which was founded by President Omar Bongo and which is essentially a local fusion of the other two.

3. (U) Omar Bongo has never hidden the fact that he is a Mason and Grand Master of his own lodge. Bongo sees no contradiction between Freemasonry and Islam and has called Freemasonry "a school of tolerance and respect for others."

4. (C) Bongo originally was initiated into the GOF and moved to the GLNF before creating the Grand Rite Equatorial (recently renamed the Grande Rite Symbolique du Gabon). He never insisted that his colleagues follow his moves from lodge to lodge; in fact, there appears to have been a conscious decision to ensure wide representation among the three lodges (probably as a means of maintaining Bongo's influence and control). For example, Georges Rawiri (the recently-deceased president of the Senate, close associate of Bongo and the second-most powerful person in the country after Bongo) was a member of the GOF, while Jean Pierre Lemboubamba (eminence grise at the Presidency) is a member of the GLNF. Minister of Defense (and son of the President) Ali Bongo is a member of two lodges, the GLNF and the GRSG. Prominent opposition party members are also Masons -- UPG leader Pierre Mamoundou and UGDD leader Zachary Myboto, for example, are members of the GOF. Membership in particular lodges is not associated with party affiliation.

¶5. (C) Two recent anecdotes testify to Masonic influence. A US Embassy Warden in Port Gentil (whose husband is Gabonese) says her husband was offered a cabinet minister position, on condition that he become a Mason (he turned it down). An American businessman pursuing opportunities in Gabon's lumber sector attributes the success of his endeavors to his being a Mason and using Masonic contacts in Gabon (his escort to meetings was the MFA's chief legal advisor).

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The extended influence of Gabon's Masonic lodges on government and business is difficult to assess. However, President Bongo's own involvement as the leader of a lodge -- together with the perception that Masonic connections and influence are pervasive throughout business and government -- have created among Gabonese the belief that the best way to get ahead today is to become a Mason.

WALKLEY